

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

What is the Definition of Tawheed?

The Linguistic Meaning

Tawheed (التوحيد) is derived from the Arabic verb Wahaḥada – Yuwāḥhidu, meaning “to make something one” or “to assert the oneness of something.”



Shaykh Muhammad ibn Salih al-‘Uthaymeen رحمه الله explains: “This cannot be achieved except by negation and affirmation: negating that which is claimed by others, and affirming it solely for the One deserving of it. This is why the statement of Tawheed, La ilaha illa Allah, begins with negation (La ilaha) and ends with affirmation (illa Allah). If one only affirms without negating, it doesn't exclude others. And if one negates without affirming, it becomes complete denial.”

He continues with a powerful example: “If you say: ‘So-and-so is standing,’ you've affirmed it, but not excluded others. But if you say: ‘None is standing except Zayd,’ then you've excluded all others and affirmed it solely for Zayd. This is how Tawheed is truly realized — by negation and affirmation together.”

Shar‘ī (Technical) Definition

Technically, Tawheed is: "To single out Allah in what is unique to Him in His Lordship, Divinity, Names, and Attributes."

This is the Tawheed conveyed by all Prophets and recognized by the scholars of Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jama‘ah — from the Salaf to our time.

The Three Categories of Tawheed According to the Salaf

The scholars of the Salaf — based on Qur’anic evidence — clarified three categories of Tawheed, not as an innovation, but as a way to understand the complete belief in Allah.

1. Tawheed ar-Rububiyah

Singling out Allah in His actions — such as creation, sustenance, giving life and death, control of the universe.

Evidence: “Say: Who provides for you from the heaven and the earth? Who owns hearing and sight? Who brings out the living from the dead, and brings out the dead from the living? And who disposes the affairs? They will say: Allah.”¹

The polytheists acknowledged this, but still committed shirk in worship.

2. Tawheed al-Uluhiyyah (Tawheed al-Ibaadah)

Singling out Allah in our actions — prayer, supplication, sacrifice, reliance, fear, love, etc.

Imam Muhammad ibn Abdil-Wahhab رحمه الله wrote: “The meaning of La ilaha illa Allah is: There is no one truly deserving of worship except Allah. This is the Tawheed of worship, and it is the foundation upon which the religion is built.”

Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said: “Many people affirm that Allah is the Creator and Sustainer, but they still associate others with Him in worship. This is why the call of all Messengers was focused on Tawheed al-Ibaadah.”

Evidence: “And We did not send any messenger before you except that We revealed to him: There is no deity worthy of worship except Me, so worship Me.”²

¹ Surah Yunus, 10:31

² Surah al-Anbiyaa, 21:25

3. Tawheed al-Asmaa was-Sifaat

Affirming all of Allah's Names and Attributes in the Qur'an and Sunnah without distortion (tahrif), denial (ta'teel), or resemblance (tashbeeh).

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal رحمه الله said: "We believe in the Attributes of Allah as they have come in the Book and the Sunnah without how (kayf) and without resemblance."

Evidence: "There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing."³

"And to Allah belong the most beautiful Names, so call upon Him by them."⁴

Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah رحمه الله said: "Everything that Allah described Himself with in His Book, its recitation is a cure, and its explanation is dangerous — so believe in it as it came, without asking how."

Statements of the Salaf on Tawheed

Here are direct quotes from the Salaf showing their depth of understanding:

Ibn Abbas رضي الله عنه said: "Tawheed is the statement: La ilaha illa Allah. Its meaning is: There is no true deity worthy of worship except Allah."

Mujahid ibn Jabr رحمه الله (student of Ibn Abbas) said: "Every verse in the Qur'an commanding worship of Allah is an explanation of Tawheed."

Imam al-Awzaa'i رحمه الله said: "We used to say — and the Tabi'oon used to say — that Allah is above His Throne, and we believe in what has come in the Sunnah regarding His Names and Attributes."

Imam Sufyan ath-Thawri رحمه الله said: "It is not Tawheed to say: 'Allah is One' unless you single Him out in worship."

Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله said: "Tawheed is the foundation of the religion, the key to the message, and the beginning and end of the call."

³ Surah ash-Shura 42:11

⁴ Surah al-A'raf, 7:180

He also رحمه الله said: “The most noble knowledge, the greatest obligation, and the foundation of faith is knowing Allah through His Names, Attributes, and Actions.”

Shaykh al-Albani رحمه الله said: “The call to Tawheed must be revived as the first step, just as the Prophet ﷺ did in Makkah. Without it, no true reform can happen.”

The Importance of Tawheed

The entire purpose of creation and revelation is to establish Tawheed.

Allah says: “And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.”⁵

The Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever dies knowing that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah will enter Paradise.”⁶

Shaykh al-Fawzan حفظه الله said: “Tawheed is the key to Paradise. But just as a key must have the right ridges to open the door, the Shahadah must be said with sincerity, knowledge, and certainty — and lived by.”

Consequences of Abandoning Tawheed

Abandoning Tawheed, or committing Shirk, is the gravest sin.

Allah says: “Indeed, Allah does not forgive associating partners with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills.”⁷

"And it was already revealed to you and to those before you: If you associate others with Allah, your deeds will surely be in vain, and you will certainly be among the losers."⁸

Ibn Mas‘ud رضي الله عنه said: “Whoever dies associating anything with Allah will enter the Hellfire.”⁹

⁵ Surah adh-Dhariyat, 51:56

⁶ Sahih Muslim

⁷ Surah an-Nisa, 4:48

⁸ Surah Az-Zumar 39:65

⁹ Sahih al-Bukhari

Imam Ibn al-Mubarak رحمه الله said: “How many deeds are small in your eyes, but with Tawheed they are made great. And how many deeds are great in your eyes, but with Shirk, they are ruined.”

Al-Fudhayl ibn ‘Iyadh رحمه الله said: “Woe to you! You do not know Tawheed. If you did, you would never oppose its people.”

The Relationship Between Tawheed and Salvation

"Whoever comes with a good deed will have ten times the like thereof..."¹⁰

"Whoever dies knowing that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah shall enter Paradise."¹¹

Ibn Abbas رضي الله عنهما said: “The meaning of ‘La ilaha illa Allah’ is: There is no deity worthy of worship except Allah.”

Al-Hasan al-Basri رحمه الله said: “Tawheed is the key to Jannah. But every key has teeth — if you bring the right key, the door will open for you.”

Conclusion

Tawheed is not a single subject among many — it is the very heart of Islam. It is the first pillar, the first command, the first message, and the first obligation.

It was the beginning of the Prophet’s ﷺ da’wah, and it must be the beginning of ours. The Salaf lived by it, called to it, defended it, and died for it.

May Allah make our hearts firm upon His Tawheed, purify us from all forms of shirk, and allow us to meet Him with a heart full of sincere devotion to Him alone.

¹⁰ Surah Al-An‘am 6:160

¹¹ Sahih Muslim

